

Questions and Answers About the Kidneys and Kidney Disease

Fact Sheet



What to ask your doctor or health care provider:

Based on my
medical and family
history, am I at risk
for kidney disease?

Do my blood
and urine tests
show signs of
kidney disease?

How often should
I be tested?

How can I keep my
kidneys healthy?

Bring these questions
and a list of your
medicines with you
when you visit
the doctor.

What is kidney disease?

Your kidneys (two fist-sized organs located in the lower back) keep you healthy by filtering waste and extra water from your blood, which then leave the body in urine. Kidney disease results from damage, over time, to the tiny structures inside the kidneys that filter the blood. When the kidneys are damaged, they slowly stop doing their job and waste builds up in the blood, harming the body.

If kidney disease is not treated, it can lead to kidney failure. This means the kidneys stop working. **Once the kidneys fail, a person must either begin dialysis or get a kidney transplant.**

Am I at risk for kidney disease?

You are at risk for kidney disease if you have:

- Diabetes OR
- High blood pressure OR
- A family history of kidney disease (your mother, father, sister, or brother had kidney disease or kidney failure).

If you have any of these risk factors, talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting tested.

Diabetes and high blood pressure are the two leading causes of kidney failure. Managing these conditions can help reduce the stress on your kidneys. Talk to your doctor or health care provider about getting tested for kidney disease and steps you can take to protect your kidneys.

How do I know if I have kidney disease?

Testing is the only way to know if you have kidney disease. Blood and urine tests can detect kidney damage. **Kidney disease often has no symptoms** until just before the kidneys fail. Don't wait for symptoms to talk to your doctor about getting tested.

What if I have kidney disease?

If tests show you have kidney disease, you can take steps to protect your kidneys from further damage. There are medicines you can take and other things you can do—like controlling your blood sugar and keeping your blood pressure below 130/80—to help delay or prevent kidney failure.

How can I keep my kidneys healthy?

You can keep your kidneys healthy by: 1) taking steps to prevent high blood pressure and diabetes, 2) managing these conditions if you already have them, and 3) getting tested if you are at risk.

For more information, visit www.nkdep.nih.gov or call 1-866-4 KIDNEY (1-866-454-3639).